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SUBJECT: DPM ISSAWI ADVANCES NINEWA'S ARAB-KURD DIALOGUE

REF: BAGHDAD 2482

Classified By: A/DCM Gary A. Grappo for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (U) This is a Ninewa Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) message.

12. (C) SUMMARY: Deputy Prime Minister Rafi al-Issawi visited Mosul and Erbil on October 1 to further efforts to resolve the (Kurdish) Ninewa Fraternal League's (NFL) boycott of the Ninewa Provincial Council (PC) and its related disputes with the (Sunni Arab) al-Hadba List. Issawi was confident that Ninewa and KRG interlocutors would agree to compromise language regarding Article 140 issues. He expressed his concern that a proposal to recruit 14,000 members of Sunni Arab, Kurdish and other communities into mixed Iraqi Army (IA) and Iraqi Police (IP) units would take longer than expected and proposed integrating existing Peshmerga and IA units as an interim measure. Issawi concurred on the need to maintain momentum and achieve results before the January 2010 national election; he intends to reconvene the parties soon with the aim of reaching a final agreement. Governor al-Nujaifi stressed that the issue of whether Kurdish forces allow non-Kurdish provincial government employees to move freely throughout the province will be closely watched as a bellwether of Kurds' seriousness about agreement on power-sharing and other issues. Issawi's shuttle diplomacy was critical to moving the dialogue forward - he even convinced the usually pessimistic Ninewa governor to ponder future collaboration with the NFL. End summary.

13. (C) On October 1, Deputy Prime Minister (DPM) Rafi al-Issawi met with Ninewa Governor Atheel al-Nujaifi and First Vice Governor Faisal al-Yawar in Mosul before traveling to Erbil to meet with KRG Minister of Interior Abdul Karim Sinjari. Ninewa PRT Team Leader met with Issawi on October 1 in Mosul prior to his meeting with al-Nujaifi; the Senior RefCoord and other Emboffs met with the DPM in Baghdad on October 5. Issawi's visits were part of his ongoing effort to resolve the NFL's boycott of the Ninewa PC and its related disputes with al-Hadba. In late September, Issawi convened Ninewa and KRG leaders in Baghdad, following a Ninewa PRT-hosted dialogue (reftel).

MAINTAINING MOMENTUM & HARMONY

14. (C) Issawi, joined by senior advisor Jaber al-Jaberi, said maintaining momentum on the dialogue was critical. "If we don't resolve the boycott soon," he said, "it will take at least six months after the January election to get back to this stage of the talks." PRT TL assured Issawi that PRT Ninewa had put its local mediation effort on hold to avoid complicating Issawi's effort. Issawi said he encouraged a parallel dialogue in Mosul "as long as we coordinate on the process and the results." (Note: The Embassy's senior interagency coordination group for Northern Iraq issues agreed on September 25 that the PRT should continue to suspend its mediation pending further assessment of Issawi's

effort. End note.)

15. (C) Commenting on the apparent split between competing al-Hadba factions, Issawi expressed concern that al-Nujaifi did not represent the consolidated Sunni Arab al-Hadba Grouping in negotiations. (Note: Sheikh Abdullah al-Yawar (al-Shammar), acting paramount sheikh of the influential al-Shammari tribe, heads one faction; Governor al-Nujaifi leads the other. End note.) Issawi spoke with Sheikh Abdullah before the meeting in Mosul and secured his agreement to send a representative. First Vice Governor Faisal al-Yawar, Sheikh Abdallah's elder brother, represented QFaisal al-Yawar, Sheikh Abdallah's elder brother, represented Abdallah's faction at the meeting with Issawi.

THE FINE PRINT ON ARTICLE 140

16. (C) During his visits to Mosul and Erbil, Issawi presented both sides with an updated paper outlining nine proposed initiatives to facilitate compromise. The two sides had previously reached agreement in principle on all but two: Article 140 and the presence of Kurdish forces in Ninewa. On Article 140, Issawi said the crux of the matter was that Sunni Arabs viewed the process as favoring the Kurds and therefore opposed it, while the Kurds insisted that Article 140 was the legitimate basis for resolving boundary disputes.

17. (C) Issawi told Emboffs he secured agreement from al-Nujaifi and al-Yawar on the following language: "Ninewa Province shall be regarded as a single administrative unit, to include the disputed areas, which should be resolved

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according to the provisions of the constitution". The KRG's Sinjari subsequently insisted on referring to "the present constitution" as a way to enshrine Article 140 as the point of reference for resolving DIBs issues. Stressing that his focus is on getting the two sides to reach a modus vivendi on DIBs that allows progress on other initiatives and a power-sharing compromise, Issawi was confident he could get al-Nujaifi to accept the change.

INTERIM INTEGRATION OF EXISTING UNITS PROPOSED

18. (C) Characterizing language on the presence in Ninewa of Peshmerga and Assayesh elements as the most divisive of the nine proposed initiatives, Issawi expressed concern that the proposal to recruit 14,000 mixed Arab, Kurd, and other cadres into Ninewa's Iraqi Police (IP) and Iraqi Army (IA) units would take more time than anticipated. He suggested that existing Peshmerga and IA units be integrated as an interim measure until the recruitment of additional cadres could be orchestrated. Issawi said both al-Nujaifi and Sinjari expressed support for the interim measure.

19. (C) Issawi told PRT TL that he also saw Ninewa's budget execution problems as a key challenge for the province. The DPM said the 11th hour approval by the Council of Representatives (parliament) of a 2009 budget supplement of USD 200 million for Ninewa and USD 250 million in 2010 funds came too late to address immediate needs. The Ministry of Finance had therefore designed a plan that would provide a 25 percent "down payment" on any project contract the Ninewa provincial government is able to secure.

VIEWS FROM THE GOVERNOR

110. (C) Al-Nujaifi told PRT TL his two-hour meeting with Issawi had been productive and helpful, noting that Issawi paid close attention to specific wording on several key al-Hadba positions. On Article 140, al-Nujaifi insisted the issue was not about the provincial government's ability to

administer territory within mutually recognized borders, but rather about language used to describe the process of resolving DIBs. Al-Hadba also insisted on freedom of movement throughout Ninewa for all government employees, including those aligned with the governing party. "If the Kurds allow this," Alnujaifi noted, "it would be an important sign of goodwill." If they do not, he said, al-Hadba would judge that the Kurds "are not serious about finding a solution." Al-Nujaifi boldly predicted that if the NFL returned to the PC, its members would within months abandon the NFL and join al-Hadba.

¶11. (C) COMMENT: Issawi, al-Nujaifi and al-Yawar were relatively optimistic about the prospects for forward movement. Issawi stressed that Ninewa's political leaders should not look to Baghdad for all the answers; however, he intends to reconvene the two sides in Baghdad or Mosul soon with the aim of finalizing an agreement. In the context of the national election campaign, Issawi appears to want to demonstrate that he can deliver on key security issues, a dominant theme being successfully mined by, among others, PM Maliki. Issawi's visit was critical to moving the dialogue forward, and he even convinced the usually pessimistic al-Nujaifi to ponder future collaboration with the NFL. End Comment.

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